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introduction

[image]

I think it's important to have diversity in what you read, specifically diversity in protagonists. Not only is it more interesting, but it helps you as a reader to see the world through different eyes. It also is important for readers who find it harder to relate to protagonists who aren't diverse. To be completely honest, there isn't much diversity in warriors fanfics, which is why I think it's even more important for these characters to be written. Warriors has a younger audience generally, and therefore it's important for these young people to see a variety of main characters.

For *The Stars Lied*, I wanted to write a character who was on the autism spectrum. Sealshadow, the protagonist, is a warrior with Asperger's syndrome. However, she lives in a clan that isn't aware of her needs and, quite frankly, many of the warriors around her are ableist snakes that take advantage of her. I'm warning you now that ableism and overall terrible and rude behavior is something you will see in this fic.

I have done research into Asperger's and autism, but **I am NOT an expert**. I encourage you to look into it on your own time. I'm just out here trying to add some representation to the pool of fanfic we have on wattpad, and trying my best to tell a story.

This is a prophecy story, too. I don't usually make prophecy fics because I'd just rather... not... but I wanted to do one for this fic. Hopefully I did it okay haha

and yes. When you read the allegiances, you may notice if you're really really educated on nature, that some prefixes are from Australia but some can't be found in straya. Around halfway I was

like: hey. Who really cares? So I made the prefixes from beaches around the world. Yes. This is a beach clan. It's cool I swear.

allegiances

[image]

BLUFFCLAN

the lone clan of strong paws and wholesome bodies

LEADER

stonestar . *long haired cream tabby she-cat with white*

DEPUTY

piperwhisker . *very small, light golden brown tabby and white tom*

MEDICINE CAT

crabberry . *old ginger tabby tom*

apprentice, albatrossleaf

WARRIORS

turtleclaw . *brown tabby and white molly*

dolphincloud . *sleek gray tom*

clamsplash . *gray-brown tabby molly*

palmshine . *white and brown tabby tom (apprentice, snipepaw)*

sealshadow . *dark brown spotted tabby molly*

oysternose . *dilute calico point molly*

raywave . gray molly

foampelt . *white tom with gray (apprentice, ploverpaw)*

oatleap . *pale ginger tabby*

pelicanwing . *white tom with black (apprentice, cloudpaw)*

vinesplash . *ginger tabby tom*

saltfur . *white molly*

sandtail . *cream tabby tom*

shellfang . *tortoiseshell tabby and white molly*

brumbyheart . *chocolate tom*

APPRENTICES

albatrossleaf . white and gray molly

cloudpaw . *white molly*

snipepaw . *brown tabby tom*

ploverpaw . *pale brown tabby tom*

QUEENS (cats who nurse and/or watch over kits)

kangaroostep . *ruddy abyssinian molly*

mouseflower . *light gray and white tom*

KITS

ternkit . *gray ticked tabby and white tom*

avocetkit . *calico ticked tabby molly*

curlewkit . *black ticked tabby tom*

ELDERS

sumacleap . *ginger tabby tom*

nina . *black molly*

otterblossom . *tortoiseshell molly*

COMPANY

coral . *tortoiseshell and white molly*

tuna . blue-*gray and white tom*

calla . *white tom*

shark . *light gray tabby molly*

prologue

[image]

A dark brown spotted tabby breathed in a shaky breath. Dull dusk light cascaded across the sandy beachside, and night winds battered at her bloodied and clawed up pelt. Everything was aching. Her paws, her muscles, her mind, her heart. She grit her teeth, shutting her eyes tight and forcing back a sob.

"You said you would be there for me, Sealshadow..!" The battle-torn she-cat gazed up with blue-green eyes, though the edges of her vision were starting to blur. Opposite to her was a white tom, his medium-length fur matted with blood and mottled with dirt.

"I know... I know, and I'm sorry. I'm so sorry...." She averted her gaze the second she saw it: the heartbreak and pain in his eyes.

"How could you do this? To me? To us? To *everyone*?! Please, just come back to me!" He yelled over the wind, his eyes closing as he yowled. Sealshadow gasped for air; she hadn't realized she had been holding her breath. Rain began to prickle at her pelt, and she hung her head, and her voice was barely audible over the wind.

"I should be asking you the same thing."

i

[image]

A gentle wind billowed at Sealshadow's pelt, bringing with it the heavy scents of salt and sand. Seagulls called overhead, their caws drowning in the crashing waters. Waves tumbled and sprayed in the stretch of sand before her, washing up on shore before retreating back, leaving darker, coagulated, wet sand. She relished in days like this: days where the sun warmed the sand but the cool ocean breezes kept everyone cool. The warrior blinked open her icy green eyes, looking out across the endless emerald blue waves crowned with white.

"Come on, Sealshadow!" A call sounded. She picked her head up, blinking away the image before her to pay attention to the cat who had called her. Standing at the top of an outcrop of rocks leading away from the beach's edge was Dolphincloud. The gray tom's sleek pelt was highlighted with the white sunlight. His paws were dark with wet sand, and a plump, large, brown mottled bird sat at his paws. The snipe had taken both to catch, though Sealshadow was vaguely aware the tom would take most of the credit for the great catch. *That's fine. At least I know I helped my clan out.* She began picking her way up the rocky coast to Dolphincloud. He looked down on her, and she kept her eyes down at his paws.

"Sorry...," she murmured, "It's just so beautiful."

"You've lived here your whole life; it's not some new experience...," then, under his breathe and barely audible, "sand-head." Picking up the snipe to continue walking, Dolphincloud led the way down the sandy-colored rocks. Tall oat grass poked up in alongside the rocks, waving in the breeze and camouflaging the cats. While the cats' camp was hard for larger predators and animals to enter, they always thought it best to try their best to keep the way to camp a secret.

Many caverns lined the shores of BluffClan's territory, but the cavern which they chose as their home had only one entrance and one exit. The exit was only to be used in emergencies, but the entrance was a small burrowed hole at the bottom of a sand dune. Dolphincloud led the way in, turning his head awkwardly to fit the bird in as well.

"Ah, I see the rest of the hunting patrol is back. Nice catch!" Immediately they were greeted by Piperwhisker, the deputy. The pale golden-brown tabby tom purred was lounging under the Speaking Ledge, long white belly fur like a cloud under his small body. The two trod down the small tumble of rocks that paved the way down into the camp, which had stone floor and stone walls.

"Thanks, I managed to catch it without a problem!" Dolphincloud purred cheerfully, dropping the great bird on a pile of fish, birds, and a few mice. The cavern was fairly small, but the ceiling stretched higher than any cat could jump. Light poured in from the enterance as well as from a small gap in the top, and just barely scratched through the emergency exit. The exit had been covered seasons and seasons ago with vines, grass, and brush to keep any twolegs from finding the home. It was a much broader opening sitting at the top of a rock cave-in, and it was certainly big enough for a two-leg. Just below the opening was the ocean, though, and the waves echoed through the cavern.

"I'm sure you did," Piperwhisker murmured, amused. "Sealshadow, nice weather?" He asked as she passed. She pricked her ears and glanced over.

"Ahm— uh, yeah. It was pretty nice," she flicked her tail as she spoke, averting his gaze. He gave her a nod. Piperwhisker was one of the few cats in the clan who would hold conversation with her.

"I was out on dawn patrol this morning and it was a bit brisk, but I bet by now it's beautiful. We actually scented a few loners, so we might get some more Company." Sealshadow's eyes lit up.

"Really?" He nodded. "I should go back out and hunt some more? They'll probably be hungry." He gave a purr and stood.

"You just got back, why don't you rest? I'll go ahead and hunt; make myself a bit useful." The dark spotted tabby she-cat blinked.

"You're one of the most useful cats in the clan, though!" She meowed in disbelief. The deputy chuffed a laugh.

"Thank you, Sealshadow. Go get some rest, the sun can suck all of your energy." She gave a firm nod and padded further into camp. Dens were made against overhangs and dips, made by paws using palm branches, grasses, vines, brush, and various things throughout the territory. The warriors den was the largest, and as the dark tabby she-cat neared, she knew today would not be her day to lounge outside of it. While the cheerful traveler Tuna and fellow warrior Oysternose were laying outside, there was also Vinesplash. *Vinesplash really doesn't like me. He always hisses at me. I don't like him that much either, though; he's always so irritable. So, I guess, my best option is somewhere else.*

Looking throughout the camp, though, she found most of the other cats sharing tongues were cats who preferred to share tongues without her. *That's alright. They all just want to gossip and whatnot, I'd rather not lay with them anyway.* She made her way to the edge of camp, settling down in a pile of spare palm branches. The shadows welcomed her, as they always did, and she began to clean her fur to rid the salt and sand that had dirtied it on the hunt. She let her tail swish back and forth calmly as she worked at her pelt, thinking to herself.

This was how it had always been. As an apprentice she had had many friends. And then... it happened. She paused in her grooming, remembering it. The blood. The fur. The crying. The screaming. The hissing. More blood. Blood. Blood blood blood bloodblood*bloodbloodblood. Dead.* Sealshadow resumed cleaning her fur, feeling her pelt heat up with the sorrowful memory. *I need to go get something to eat. It's after my sun high hunting patrol, so it's mealtime.*

"Sealshadow, can you come here for a second?" She picked up her head in surprise. Standing before was Crabberry. She narrowed her eyes and stood up, confused.

"What's-."

"Come with me," Immediately the bright ginger tabby was whisking her along. *Crabberry, the medicine cat? What does he want with me...?*

"What's going on—? Please don't touch me!" She yelped as he pushed her into the medicine den. It had been rebuilt by Sandtail a few moons prior and was much bigger, branches were propped against the stone wall and plastered with mud and palm leaves for the herb storage area, and brush was built around to wall in the patient area. "Please don't touch me," she repeated, and he nodded.

"Yes, sorry. Alright, sit down."

She sat.

He sat across from her, yellow eyes sharp. Crabberry was a dulling ginger, and probably was much more handsome in his younger days. His muzzle was graying, and silvery hairs mixed in with his aging pelt. Today, his short fur was unkempt and dirty, as if it hadn't been groomed in a Moon.

"Crabberry...? What's going on...?"

"I've been telling Stonestar for moons about this, I know it's coming soon..!" He stood, and began pacing frantically. *What in StarClan's name—*. "Do you ever feel very connected to StarClan? Have you ever had dreams? Or how about the urge to—."

"I don't want to— sorry, I'm sorry I cut you off— I don't want to be a medicine cat. Albatrossleaf is already a good medicine cat, anyway," her tail flicked back and forth anxiously.

"No. There's a prophecy that's been passed down for over three generations. I can feel it, it's going to come true soon, and I think you might be the key!!!" He shoved his muzzle in her face, and she fell backward onto her back with a squeal.

"*Crabberry*, stop harassing cats!" Crabberry scowled, and backed away, and, still on her back, Sealshadow tipped her head back to look at who entered. Albatrossleaf. She was one of the prettier cats in the clan, with a delicate face, medium-long, soft, white hair, gray

patches, and round leaf-green eyes.

"I wasn't harassing her, this is StarClan's prophecy. I have a duty to the Stars!" He defended himself, his back arched. Albatrossleaf sighed sharply and leaned down to help Sealshadow up. She shrugged off the touch, getting up on her own. The medicine-cat gave an understanding look to the dark tabby.

"Sorry about him. He's been going on about a prophecy that's *false*."

"Not false! True! Completely true, and we have to find the 'one who walks in darkness,' before it's too late! It's got to be Sealshadow, she's always—."

"Crabberry, could you please go start the cleaning process on the burdock I gathered?" She meowed sharply. She had dropped a pile of dirt-clad roots at the den's opening before cutting in. The senior medicine cat grumbled, but did as she had asked.

"Back when I was an apprentice, I never bossed ol' Blueroot around. My mentor would've had my tail, even if I already had my full name...," he growled bitterly under his breath. The young medic sighed, looking to Sealshadow. The spotted tabby stared at her paws awkwardly.

"He's convinced he can sense that it's going to come true. Stonestar, Piperwhisker, and I all know if it were to come true, it would've come true generations ago when it was first given. That's just how prophecies work. And since he's getting so old...," she thought aloud before laughing gently. Her laugh was sweet, and her eyes closed as she did so. Sealshadow felt her pelt grow hot, and she stood.

"Don't worry about it, I should.. go. Now." She ducked her head and left the den, her dark fur burning. She head to grab a sandpiper from the fresh-kill pile, her stomach eager for it's meal of the day. She settled down in the spot she had been taken from, able to hear the bickering between the medicine cats from the close distance. *Even if it is fake, I would want to know what the prophecy is. It sounds cool. Prophecies and StarClan... it's all stuff from the old clans. It's so... cool.*

She was so lost in thought, she nearly jumped through the cavern roof in shock as she felt someone prod her shoulder. Even more adrenaline rushed through her as she realized that she *didn't know or even recognize the cat.*

"GAH! Who are you?!" She yipped, eyes wide with shock. A white tom stood before her.

"Are you going to eat that...?"

//

pictured above: Sealshadow

Yo dawg I'm probably going to try and update once a week on Wednesdays, but I might make updates closer together if I can keep up with it (I'm currently a few chapters ahead of what I post)

ii

[image]

"You going to eat that..?" He referenced to the sandpiper she had only started to defeather. His face was rimmed with medium long, stark white fur and he had striking blue eyes. His nose was a soft pink, as were the insides of his finely shaped, erect ears.

"Yes--it's mealtime. Who... who are you...?" She looked out into camp, where all of the cats who had once been relaxed were now bustling around. The border patrol had just arrived, and with them was a lovely light gray tabby, and she assumed this tom was also part of it.

"I'm just a stray. But the name's Calla. So... you gonna eat that...?" *He must be new Company!*

"Calla...? Like the twoleg flowers? They don't grow in the territory — I—er... yeah! You can have it." She nosed to sandpiper to him, and he purred. *He must be starving! The Company we take in are loners, so he's probably not had a meal every day like me.*

"Yeah. It's Calla, like the twoleg flowers. Thanks, molly," he picked up the small bird and padded back to the others. *Wha—?* Very clearly and loudly, she heard the gray tabby growl at his arrival.

"Really Calla? Always thinking with your stomach and not your head. Go put the prey back, we still don't know if we're allowed to stay!" The other loner growled. He sheepishly ducked his head with a laugh. Sealshadow neared curiously. The gray she-cat was a sight: pale gray tabby, with a darker gray face, legs, and tail, and neat white paws. Tabby stripes lined the darker parts of her fur, giving the she-cat a sharp look. Her eyes were a piercing blue— wait... Sealshadow paused, feeling her fur raise slightly. Her *eye* was piercing blue. *She only has one eye!* The other eye, her right eye,

was just.. gone. Gray fur covered where an eye had once been.

The she-cat scowled as her eyes met the dark tabby warrior.

"What're you looking at, dog breath?" The loner growled. Sealshadow took a step back, eyes wide.

"Ah, don't mind Sealshadow, she tends to stare...," the leader of the patrol, Pelicanwing, brushed it off. The gray tabby loner held her head up with a huff, and Cloudpaw hurried over from the direction of the leader's den. The white tom whispered something in his mentor Pelicanwing's ear, his eyes bright. "Also, good news, Stonestar is ready to see you two. She's this way."

Sealshadow watched the loners pad off to the den crafted into the side of the Stone Ledge, her sea-green eyes carefully following Calla.

"I bet Stonestar will let them stay as Company, no doubt. Maybe even let them become warriors later if they want." Oatleap, who had also been on the patrol, pad over. Their amber eyes were as soft as their golden brown tabby pelt, and they gave a small twitch of their whiskers in greeting.

"Yeah..? Calla seemed nice." Oatleap blinked.

"Yeah. He did seem nice. You never know what's really under a cat's skin though, ya know? And Shark... she's a real fighter. I'm sure she'd make a great addition to the clan if she decided to take the next step after Company. But it'll be interesting to see how many heads she butts with to get to that point." Oatleap glanced up, and their eyes lit up as they saw someone else. "Ah, Shellfang's here! See you later, maybe." The sunny brown tabby bounded across the cavern to a tortoiseshell she-cat. *Oh. Okay. See you later, I guess.*

Sealshadow watched Oatleap happily chat with Shellfang. She slumped down, staring at her paws, feeling as cold as the shadows she lay in. She glanced up as she felt a strange burning feeling, as if someone were watching her. Sure enough, as quick as she looked up, she briefly caught the gaze of Crabberry as he quickly averted his yellow eyes. Her brows creased in confusion. *He thinks I'm part*

of some prophecy. I wonder if it's bad though. It might be one of those bad ones. The elders called bad prophecies 'omens.' What if I'm part of an omen, and I'm going to die?! She met Crabberry's eyes as they flashed up, and he nodded his head as if to say "follow me." She thought for a moment before standing up. He already set off, hobbling up the slopes that led to the entrance to camp, and quickly bounded away to shadow after him.

The sudden burst of sunlight briefly blinded her as she stepped out of the cave, and she took a moment to let her eyes adjust. She glanced around to where she could see the red fur of Crabberry as he disappeared into a sand dune lined with beachgrass. She made after the small prints in the sand that marked where the tom had tread off. The loose grit attempted to slip her up as she climbed the slight incline of the dune, but it was no match for the muscled warrior who merely bounded up the hill and into the tall grasses.

The old medicine cat was waiting in a small clearing of the dune. Grass lined the front half, and short saltbush dotted the back that sloped out to a view of the shoreline.

"Good. You're curious," the old tom meowed thoughtfully. His eyes were narrowed and gleaming.

"I just want to know what the prophecy is. Does it say I'll get hurt? Does it say if anyone gets hurt?" Sealshadow ducked her head, her tail tucking. He sighed and started pacing.

"Hopefully no-one is hurt. The prophecy is vague, I'm not sure what it means. It was told generations ago, but I just *know* it's going to come soon. I feel it in my bones! Albatrossleaf doesn't *believe* me, she thinks I'm crazy!" Sealshadow's eyes widened with shock. "Sealshadow, tell me, are you... good? Are you a good cat?" Her tail swished back and forth anxiously.

"I-- I think I am, but some of my classmates don't like me. Maybe they think... I'm not good?" The spotted tabby paused, her tail quivering. "I try to be good, I've only done one bad thing, I swear!"

"Oh, so do you ever crave violence? Feel anger for no reason?!" He shoved his muzzle in her face, and she jumped back at the contact.

"N-No! No, never! I've only done one bad thing, and Stonestar said it wasn't my fault!" Crabberry slowed, and some sort of sensibility seemed to pass through his eyes. He backed up.

"That's right. I forgot about... the accident." Sealshadow ducked her head, and he sat down. "That settles it. You tried to stop the accident, so you *are* a good cat."

"Is that... the prophecy? A good cat saves the clan?"

"No. It's... complicated. We've never been able to understand it fully. '*One who walks in darkness will destroy the light.'* We've never know which one was the danger, and what was even what. At first the medicine cats who got the prophecy thought the cat who 'walks in darkness' was evil, and would 'destroy the light,' whatever that is. But then when it didn't come true, they figured the prophecy was a dud or something. Then it became just a practice for medicine cat apprentices on what they thought it meant. The idea we had it backwards soon came up: what if the 'one who walks in darkness' was saving the clan by 'destroying the light?'"

"...Is this real?" He nodded.

"One hundred percent. It's going to come true in this generation, I'm sure of it. I'm also sure that *you* are the cat who walks in darkness." He stood up, shaking sand out of his fur. "I'll be on the lookout for whatever 'the light' could be." *I'm... a cat of prophecy...?! This is* just *like the old Clans! I can't wait to tell Piperwhisker or the Company!--* He held his tail up. "Sealshadow, before I forget, you can't tell *anyone*. It could put you in danger! If 'the light' figures out that you could destroy them, they'll *kill* you." She gaped, a shiver passing through.

"Y-yes, Crabberry. I won't tell anyone! I promise!" He nodded.

"You can only trust me-- and Albatrossleaf... but maybe don't tell her? She'll be mad if she knows I'm still working at this prophecy. I'll see you around, 'Dark One.'" The tom disappeared through the grasses, leaving Sealshadow behind. The chocolate brown she-cat took a deep breath in, and slowly let it out. *Deep breath in, and out. Just like Albatrossleaf taught you back when it happened. When you're scared, take a deep breath in and let it out.* She remembered being in

the medicine den, blood dripping down from her split ear. She could only pace back and forth, frozen with shock. The only sound she could make was a soft incoherent mumble. Albatrossleaf was an apprentice then as well, and was the only cat who would take the time to talk her down. *She's really sweet... she always knows what to say to help me.* After a few moments of deep breathes, she gave a firm nod and head out of the dune back to camp.

//

pictured above is Calla; though Calla has blue eyes rather than amber.

iii

[image]

There was more energy in the camp than when she had left. As she looked down from the top of the slope at the entrance, she saw the two new loners, Calla and Shark, standing in the clearing surrounded by a few warriors. She jumped as she felt a brush by her side, but settled once she realized it was Piperwhisker.

"Sorry, didn't mean to bump you," he meowed as he dropped a small black and white feathered oystercatcher. "Did we get new Company while I was gone?" Sealshadow felt a purr rise in her throat as she realized that Calla and Shark had been allowed to stay as Company.

"We did! We should go meet them-- I'm sure they want to get to know the Deputy of the Clan they're staying with!" She purred brightly, her tail waiving with excitement. Piperwhisker ducked his head with a small laugh and a purr. He always looked at her differently than the other cats. It was a kind look, it wasn't mean like how Kelpwhisker or Dolphincloud looked at her. It was kind, and it was soft. He blinked, and awkwardly picked up the bird. *Crabberry said I can't tell anyone about the prophecy...* She looked to the undersized, pale gold tabby, longing to tell him of her newfound destiny, and decided rather to make her way down to the the new Company.

"...And so then, I tackled the rogue off of Shark right on time!" Calla pounced onto the ground, making the warriors around him jump back with shock.

"But how did you both escape alive against *six* rogues?! That's impossible!" Sandtail meowed doubtfully.

"I'm getting there, I'm getting there!" Calla purred, letting his tail

flick over the cream tabby tom's nose playfully. His face twisted at the stranger's contact at first, but then he gave a small purr of amusement. Calla's blue eyes briefly caught Sealshadow's, and immediately he perked up and gave a smile. She looked off to the side toward the ground. "Hello, molly!" *He's addressing me by my gender, again. That's so weird; I don't call him 'tom.'*

"I'm not called molly, I'm called Sealshadow." She meowed indignantly. The three other warriors gathered for the story let our a ripple of a laughs. Piperwhisker followed up from behind.

"Alright, *Sealshadow*. I was just telling the story of how I got this scar!" He referenced to a long pink link running across his back leg. It was mostly hidden by medium-long fur, but was noticeable once pointed out. "It was just Shark and me versus *six* rogues. We thought we could take them in a fight, but we almost bit it. I managed to save Shark, but right as I tackled the rogue on her, *another* rogue barreled into me!" He fell to the ground, and laughter rose up from the cats; even Piperwhisker let out a short purr. Shark sat a tail length away, eye half closed with amusement as she watched the well-muscled tom tell the story.

"You're so dramatic. I could've gotten out of that hold anyway," the gray tabby point defended herself. Calla gave a deep nod.

"Without a doubt I know you could've; but you know me and how I have to be the star of *every* show. But, it *was* your idea that saved the day in the end!"

"I don't believe this! What was her idea?" Sandtail growled lightheartedly.

"Simple: we ran to a nearby twoleg den that had a dog! They chased us, but were too scared to go near the dog!" Calla jumped dramatically, landing neatly on his paws.

"Wow! I've never even seen a dog, you've seen a dog?!" Sealshadow couldn't hold in her amazement. Calla nodded.

"Yeah, they can be *really* big, but some are smaller than us! They always have a terrible stench though, and the big ones could rip a

seasoned fighter to shreds." The spotted tabby jumped back with fear, but Piperwhisker flicked his tail giving her a soft look.

"Don't worry, there aren't any dogs on our beach; the twolegs never bring dogs here." The deputy comforted.

"Those rogues sounded scary, too. You must've been really brave to fight them." Sealshadow murmured. Sandtail shook his head.

"No, he's just telling tales. It sounds like something Sumacleap would make up to entertain kits," the cream tabby explained.

"...Oh. Why would he lie, though?" Sandtail scoffed.

"Because he 'has to be the star of every show.' It's just a story."

"...If you say so. But how else would I have gotten this scar?" Calla drawled. He let out a sigh. "Well, Shark and I should go make our nests in the den where the Company stay. Thanks for letting us stay in your Clan until we can get back on our paws, by the way."

"As long as you give us crazy stories, you can stay as long as you want, as far as I'm concerned." Sandtail purred. Piperwhisker had an odd look in his eyes as he followed the white loner. *He looks at Calla a completely different way then how he looks at me. He looks... distrustful of him.*

"I'll talk to you later, Sealshadow. I'm supposed to have a meeting with Stonestar," he dipped his head and padded away toward the den under the Speaking Stone.

Sandtail whisked his tail, walking off with the other warriors to sit outside the warriors den and talk. Sealshadow watched them leave without her, and looked to her usual spot on abandoned palm branches in the shadows. *I guess I shouldn't bother them. I never ate my sandpiper that Calla stole, anyway; I'm starving!* She grabbed a sandpiper from the fresh kill pile on her way to her spot, and settled in for her meal. She had just finished removing the feathers when she caught the sky-blue gaze of the loner outside of the Company Den. He crossed camp, making his way over to her.

"Sealshadow, right?" She nodded.

"You can't have my sandpiper. This is mine, and I'm eating it," she meowed simply. He raised his brows and gave a small laugh.

"Of course, I won't touch it this time." He sat down, grooming his white fur. "I noticed your clanmates keep away from you. Why?" He gave her an earnest look, and she paused as she finished her first bite.

"Well... it's more I keep away from them. A lot of my clanmates don't like me much. I'm different from them, I guess. I just don't want them to get mad at me." The white tom scoffed.

"Sand fleas! That's ridiculous. You're funny, and great to be around. I barely even know you and I know that much!" Sealshadow ducked her head with embarrassment. "Is it okay if I get food from the fresh-kill pile? I haven't eaten in *days*." She nodded earnestly, and he disappeared to grab a meal. *This is why I like when we have Company. They're always so nice to me.* Calla returned promptly with the oystercatcher that Piperwhisker had brought back.

"My clanmates aren't always kind to me, but the company we have *are*. I'm not sure why," She confessed. Calla thought for a moment as he plucked the dark plume from his meal.

"Well, I think it's because those cats that stay with your clan are usually loners."

"They are." Sealshadow confirmed.

"And loners... know what it's like to be lonely. We understand what it's like to be you. I understand what it's like to be you. Left out. Outcast. Hated. Just because you're different. I grew up in a group of cats; not a clan, it was much smaller and unorganized. Nobody liked me there either. The other cats excluded me from everything. I ended up leaving because I was just always... so alone. Then I met Shark, and things have started to get better, and now I'm here. Cats here are so friendly and welcoming; I don't understand how they could let you be alone." He tucked into his meal. Sealshadow felt her fur warm and she nodded. *He understands me....* "I'll have your back, Sealshadow. I promise, from now on, I'll always have your back," Calla declared.

She nodded with a purr.

"I'll be there for you, too!"

iv

[image]

"You know, I've never actually eaten fish." Salted winds gently buffeted the shoreline, and waves happily lapped at the wet sands. Paw prints dotted the shore before the ocean froth ate them up, erasing the trace of the cats. Sealshadow looked to Calla with disbelief.

"Never *ever?* Not even once?" He shook his head.

"No, I don't really know how to hunt them. I've always lived in two leg place," the white tom trotted ahead before slowing down for the spotted tabby warrior to catch up.

The sun glared off the top of the ocean waves with a blinding brightness. It had been several days since Calla had shown up, and already he fit into the clan like he was one of their own. *No-one else wanted to come on my sun high hunting patrol today. I was surprised he offered to come. I guess he wasn't lying about having my back.*

"We have a lot of fish in our water, but we usually eat shorebirds. We have snook, and bass, and snappers. I like trout the best, though!"

"Yeah? Why do you usually eat shorebirds?"

"They're easier to catch."

"Oh, yeah. I bet it's hard to sneak up on a fish when you have to swim up to it," she nodded.

"Also swimming can be dangerous. The ocean is really strong," she looked out to the water. The water were calm that day, soft humming at the wind. She swished her dark banded tail back and

forth peacefully. Calla moved in closer, and she felt her fur prick on end. She jumped away as his tail touched her shoulder. "No!" She mewed sharply. "No, I don't like to be touched...," he nodded quickly, and she flashed a glance to his eyes which were wide with worry and shock.

"Sorry, sorry, I didn't know!" he meowed earnestly. She nodded deeply and quickly.

"I--I know, it's okay," she flicked her tail restlessly. He was quiet for a moment as she breathed quietly to herself. "Hey, Sealshadow, what's that?" He seemed to be reaching to her interests, but her fur stood on end once she saw what he was referencing. Crawling along the coast toward them was a dull red shelled creature.

"Crab!" She started to bound away, but Calla stayed still.

"Crab? What does it do? Is it dangerous?"

"Get back, Calla!" She froze, unwilling to leave Company behind. *Company that has my back, and I have his back!*

"Is it prey?" he looked back to her as her tail waived back and forth.

"No! It pinches and hurts!" he hummed softly.

"It smells like prey, though," the tom murmured. "I'll fight it! I'm bigger than it!" He squared up, claws unsheathing into the wet sand. Sealshadow started forward, her heart pounding at her chest. *No, no, no! It's dangerous! Why won't he listen to me?!*

"You can't fight it, it's shell is hard!" He looked back, and faltered at her desperate look. The crab neared, and he resigned, dodging away back toward Sealshadow. The second he gave in, she hurried toward the rocky ledge several strides away. She scaled the ledge with a strong leap, though Calla struggled with the resistance of the sand and had to scrabble up to the top. They sat and watched the crab continue on it's way down the coast. Sealshadow felt a purr rise in her throat.

"Why are you laughing...?" The snowy tom's voice lilted with curiousity.

"It was scary... but it was fun...!" her tail swished back and forth and her paws kneaded at the sandstone beneath her with happiness.

"It was...! Hey, did you see how the crab walked? It was so weird!" He imitated it, awkwardly walking sideways like how the shelled creature moved. Sealshadow purred louder with joy, her eyes closing happily. He purred as well, sitting back down. "The beach is beautiful," he remarked slowly. "I wish I could've grown up here, too. It's calm, and it's much nicer than two-leg place."

"What... was two-leg place like?" she questioned softly.

"I lived in dark, narrow paths between two-leg dens. The group I lived with would move a lot; I never stayed in one place for more than a moon. The two legs always chased us off. It was... really violent. There was a lot of fighting between us cats," his eyes were lost in the the thick plumes of clouds that drifted at the horizon.

"That's scary," she whispered, shrinking down. Wind buffeted his fur as he nodded solemnly.

"Shark came around then. She was just passing through at the time, and right at the time when I really needed to leave two-leg place. It was getting really bad."

"Why didn't you leave earlier?"

"...I couldn't. I had family there. Shark made me realize there was more to life, though. I cut all my ties with my family and left." He blinked wistfully and looked down at her. She glanced away to the ocean. "I can't go back there."

"You could stay here...!"

"I don't want to burden your clan more than I have. Shark was saying we should move on in the next few sunrises." Sealshadow's eyes widened and she stood up.

"No! No, you can't!" Her eyes went to him, tracing the gentle, yet defined, edges of his jaw. He blinked softly. "You can stay with BluffClan. You can become a warrior-- it's the next step after Company. Nina the elder was company, and so was Oysternose and

Kangaroostep and Palmshine!"

"That... that sounds nice," he murmured.

"I'll tell Piperwhisker. He's nice to me, so if I tell him, he'll listen to me and let you become a warrior." Calla purred softly.

"You're too kind to me, Sealshadow. Can I...?" She blinked awkwardly, and he just barely touched his cheek against her shoulder. Her breath caught in her throat, and she flinched away after the brief interaction. "Let's get some hunting done, then. You still need to teach me how to properly catch a bird!"

\\ ☆ //

Camp was quiet when they returned. Sealshadow cleaned her whiskers and paws of the last traces of her post-hunting meal, eyes half-closed. She sat in her usual shaded, solitary spot, and glanced up to watch her clanmates. Kangaroostep lounged outside the nursery while Mouseflower played with her three kits, and Albatrossleaf was outside her den laying out herbs to dry.

Cala had parted with her when they returned, saying he needed to talk to Shark privately. She could see the pair speaking quietly near the emergency exit that led to a cove was masked by a wall branches and mud, as they didn't want to attract two legs. Sunlight pooled in from the top of the exit, brightly lighting up the white tom's form. She blinked, watching Calla get flick his tail sharply with anger in the middle of the talk.

"Hey, Sealshadow," she was surprised as Piperwhisker pad up. She continued to clean her paws, but she felt a warm happiness at the presence of her friend. The small sandy tabby deputy sat down across from her. "I haven't gotten to talk with you in a while, I thought I'd say hello," he purred.

"Hello..!" she chirped, closing her eyes as she purred. He began grooming his white paws.

"How was your hunting today?"

"Good. Calla came with me, and we saw a crab! He wanted to fight it. I told him not to. Also I caught an avocet," she motioned to the large white, red, and black bird on the fresh kill pile.

"I saw that, very impressive. That was you?" She nodded brightly. They were quiet as they groomed themselves, and then the deputy spoke up again. "So you're friends with Calla...?"

"Yes, he says he has my back! Not literally, my back is *my* back; he means he's going to be a good friend and protect me." Piperwhisker stiffened, pausing his grooming.

"He does? That's... very nice of him," he cast a glance to where the white tom was now quietly, but visibly, arguing with Shark.

"I think so, too. He says he understands me because we're both loners. He says that why all Company are nice to me, but my clanmates aren't." Piperwhisker looked at her softly now, and she kept her eyes down at his paws.

"That's not fair to all of your clanmates that are nice to you, though." She thought for a moment.

"...You're right. You're nice to me. And so is Oatleap, and Albatrossleaf and--."

"Does Calla say things like that a lot? Things that make you doubt your clanmates?" She shook her head. Calla started to make his way over, the heat of the argument already dissipating from his expression.

"No. He's good. He wants to be a warrior." Piperwhisker sighed. "Isn't that exciting? Maybe other Company cats will want to become warriors if he does! Then Tuna or Coral will be warriors that stay forever!" Calla sat down next to Piperwhisker. The loner was a good bit taller than the deputy, and the smaller tom stiffened at his presence.

"Actually, Tuna is going to stay and become a warrior. He's having a ceremony in a few sunrises." Calla perked up.

"Piperwhisker, I actually was wondering if I could stay? I've fallen in love with BluffClan; I can't bare leaving. I'd miss being in this clan. That's why I was just arguing with Shark... she thinks it's stupid that I'd be willing to sacrifice my life to be a warrior who might die in battle and hunt for cats that aren't me. I think it's the best way I could live my life, though," he bowed his head, and the deputy sighed.

"I'll bring it up to Stonestar," he tipped his head up, carefully eyeing the whitecap colored top. He stood up, swishing his tail. "I'll talk to you later, Sealshadow." Sealshadow nodded, and the bicolor tom left for the leader's den.

"I think that went well!" Calla purred. Sealshadow blinked in agreement. *I can't wait for Calla to be a warrior. Maybe then my clanmates will like me more, because they'll see a fellow warrior who really, really likes me.* She started back on her fur, a happy purr rumbling in her throat.

V

[image]

"He hasn't even been here a full moon," Dolphincloud murmured.

"Some cats don't need long to know this is the best life for them. He's just got a good head on his shoulders. Not just in the brains department, either, if you know what I mean...," Shellfang purred to Raywave, who giggled as well, and ogled the muscled white tom standing under the leader's ledge.

The meeting hadn't yet been called, but cats were already gathered and milling about the center of camp. Sealshadow sat near the back, her tail wrapped neatly around her paws. Calla hadn't been able to keep quiet about becoming a warrior since they spoke to Piperwhisker, and the clan supported the magnetic, charismatic tom full-heartedly. Stonestar couldn't say 'no' to the request.

Piperwhisker took his place under the ledge, eyes moving over the crowd before stopping on Sealshadow. He blinked, and looked back to Calla. Tuna came out of the crowd as well. The blue-gray and white loner was neatly groomed, and his green eyes were bright with happiness. Stonestar pad out of his den, shaking out his long, shaggy, cream and white fur. He stepped up onto a small rock by the base of the ledge; the older tom had stopped leaping to the top of the ledge seasons ago.

"All cats old enough to swim, please gather below the Speaking Ledge for a BluffClan Meeting."

Any cats not yet gathered made their way toward the clearing, and the chatter died down. The green-eyed leader waved his tail as he started.

"BluffClan was founded by cats from far away clans seeking a new beginning. It was with loners and outcasts that formed our Clan,

and to this day we value and welcome any stray, temporarily or permanently. These two young cats have been staying with us, and have bravely decided to commit to the next step by becoming warriors of BluffClan. Tuna," he turned first to the blue and white tom. He purred brightly, unable to contain his excitement. "You have been living with us and helping to support our clan through patrols and helping Albatrossleaf with gathering herbs. You are compassionate and kind, and would make a great warrior. Do you swear to uphold our code and protect this clan, even at the cost of your life?" Tuna gave a firm nod, though he seemed to be quivering with nervousness.

"I do."

"Then, I pronounce you a full warrior of BluffClan. As a full warrior, you will be named Tunaheart." Cheers erupted from the clan.

"Tunaheart, Tunaheart!"

"Calla. You've only been with our clan a short time, but you're a cat who knows what he wants," Stonestar joked a little, and Calla gave a self-assured grin. A soft purr rippled through the gathered cats. "In your short time, though, you've managed to bond with every cat through sharing tongues and wild stories, and made strong connections to many. You've even started joining hunting patrols and supporting our young and old. You have shown great electric light that attracts many, and are a promising young cat. Do you swear to uphold our code and protect this clan, even at the cost of your life?" Calla smiled softly as he nodded determinedly.

"I do."

"Then, I pronounce you a full warrior of BluffClan. As a full warrior, you will be named Callashine."

"Callashine! Callashine!" The cheers erupted as they pronounced the new warrior's name.

"Meeting dismissed!" Sealshadow found herself purring happily. *Now he won't have to go back to his old life. But... now he's not a loner anymore. What if he stops liking me...?* She felt anxiety start to well

up in her chest, and she stood, beginning to pace. The clan swarmed the new warriors with excitement, chatter and cheers filling her ears. *It's too loud-- it's too loud!*

She found herself whimpering as she paced, her tail flicking restlessly behind her. *Calla-- Callashine won't like me anymore!*

"Hey, hey, Sealshadow? Sealshadow, it's okay," she looked up to Albatrossleaf. Piperwhisker was at her side, his eyes wide with worry.

"He won't like me-- he won't like me...,"

"Sealshadow, it's okay. I'm sure they like you--" Piperwhisker urged, unsure of who 'he' was. She shook her head desperately, her fur hot from the instability.

"No, he said he liked me because we were loners but he's not a *loner* anymore!" She cried. The deputy and medicine cat looked to each other before looking back at her.

"Sealshadow, you're being irrational. Just stop for a minute-- I'm not a loner, and I'm still friends with you. He'll still be your friend even though he has more now," Piperwhisker spoke softly, clicking that the 'he' was Callashine. Sealshadow felt herself slow down. Callashine had made his way over, his head low. Silence had fallen over the Clan as they looked at Sealshadow.

"I promised I'd have your back, Sealshadow. That promise doesn't go away now that I'm a warrior," he murmured. She looked down at the stone floor dusted with sand. The newly made warrior turned to the crowd. "And, this has been bothering me. Sealshadow is a wonderful cat and some of you treat her like she's not. She works hard, and cares so much. Stop pushing her away!" Callashine had an anger in his eyes. Dolphincloud ducked his head, and a few warriors glanced away guiltily. Piperwhisker fixed the white tom with an unreadable look, like distrust, jealousy, and admiration crashing into each other.

"Callashine is right. Sealshadow is our clanmate. We need to treat her with the respect she deserves," Piperwhisker held the gaze of

the gathered cats. "Now, we have something to celebrate. Two new warriors! Let's get some hunting patrols out so that we may feast in their honor tonight!" An apprentice let out a *mrow!* of happiness, breaking the tension. "Let's get Turtleclaw leading a patrol with Raywave and Palmshine, hit the northern coast. I want..." he continued on, but Sealshadow had tuned him out.

"Are you okay?" Callashine murmured to her. She blinked, and flicked her tail back and forth.

"Yeah. I need... some time alone," she backed up, making her way to her secluded spot. However, someone was already there. *Crabberry?*

"Sealshadow," he had a haunted look in his eyes. More gray furs had started to show up, and his pelt was filthy. His face was sunken in, as if he hadn't been sleeping or eating. A sour scent hung around him, making her nose scrunch up. "Don't... don't forget about the prophecy. I'm still trying to find 'the light.' It's harder to accuse someone of being evil than it is to accuse someone of being a hero, though. I'll let you know when I find them but... whoever it is... they're proving hard to find...." he looking out and made eye contact with Albatrossleaf. "I have to go," he darted away back to medicine den as the medicine cat apprentice slowly followed after him.

Crabberry looks like he's getting sick... maybe Albatrossleaf was right? Maybe this whole prophecy is fake?

vi

[image]

The memories of sunshine were drowning in the ocean, mere embers glowing at the horizon. Dusk set in, bringing with it cool night air. The faint rays glimmered at the edges of clouds that drifted through the sky. Sealshadow watched the sun dip below the ocean's surface among the soft, off-white sand. Callashine walked the shoreline a few fox-lengths in front of her, fascinated by how the waves pulled in and erased the prints he had left.

"I don't think I'll ever get over how beautiful it is here," the new warrior remarked, making his way over to her.

"I've always loved watching the ocean. Dolphincloud calls me a sandhead," she continued to watch the waves tumble over each other. They were energetic that night, coming in high and crashing down with force onto each other, as if they were in battle. *But what is it fighting over? Is the ocean hungry? Is it fighting over territory?*

"There's nothing wrong with loving the view here. It's beautiful," he sat down, looking at her fondly.

"I think it looks the best early in the morning." *Mom used to take me out of the camp just to look at the sunrise before coming back inside.* Her mom had told her to keep it a secret, because kits weren't supposed to leave camp.

"I think your clanmates need to appreciate things more. They don't appreciate the view, or what they have, or you."

Sealshadow swished her tail back and forth, and her paws kneaded at the sand.

"I know I just joined BluffClan, but I really do want to protect it with my life! I want it to be the absolute best it can be. Sealshadow,

can I tell you a secret...?" She tipped her head. "I... I want to become leader one day. I know it's silly, but I want to become leader so that everyone will respect you. They'll be more grateful for their freedom, and for their clanmates! I'll *make* them understand. I know it might be silly... but I have a vision for BluffClan. It's going to be a bright future." The sunlight had been completely enveloped by the ocean, but clouds hit the swaths of stars that would have started to peer down.

"You told me your secret...? Secrets are secret, though." Callashine purred.

"They are, but I wanted to share my secret with you. If you're really close friends with someone, you can share secrets with them. Really close friends are like an extension of yourself, so you can tell them anything. I think you're a great friend, Sealshadow. You're a great listener, and you care about little things that others don't. You care about the ocean, and you make sure Company are always happy! You know all about the prey and creatures on the shore, which is so cool!" He smiled brightly. She felt her heart flutter, and she purred.

"I have a secret. Since we're friends, I'll tell you," he tipped his head with interest. "Crabberry says that there's a prophecy and that *I'm in it*."

"A prophecy?"

"Yes, from StarClan."

"I've heard of StarClan from passing talk. They're dead Clan cats, right?" She nodded.

"Yes, when BluffClan warriors die, they go to StarClan and watch over us. They help keep us safe. StarClan will give us a prophecy if there's danger, and it guides us. In the old Clans, they had prophecies *all the time* because they were *always* in danger. We've never had a prophecy in BluffClan! Until now."

Callashine had his mouth agape with awe.

"Well, what's the prophecy?" He seemed excited, and she fed off the

energy with a bounce.

"'*One who walks in darkness will destroy the light.'* Isn't it cool? I'm the cat who walks in darkness, but Crabberry doesn't know who or what 'the light' is. It's kind of scary--"

"It's a lie." Callashine's eyes had darkened. She lowered down, her tail tucking slowly.

"But... StarClan sent the prophecy... to... to keep us safe--safe."

"It's a lie. Prophecies aren't real, they can't be," she blinked in shock at his words. *Albatrossleaf* did *say the prophecy wasn't real.... Callashine seems kind of.. scary right now.* Sealshadow backed up. "I mean, they're not real, but *I* am. Ya'know? I'm real, and my vision is real." She relaxed a little at this. "I'm planning a whole new future if I become leader. It's not some lie from the Stars, it's something solid that I know. I'm going to make this Clan great, and... I want you to be there with me when I do."

"I... have your back," she meowed simply. "I... I like you a lot, Callashine. You make me smile, and sometimes you make my heart beat really fast." He purred at this. "I'm sad my secret wasn't a real secret."

"Well... do you have any other secrets?" She thought for a moment but ducked her head. The memory of blood flashed in her head. *I tried to stop it--* She could remember the salt waves crashing over head as she fought through a current. A cat at the shore was screaming her name. *I tried to save him, but all that was left....*

"I... do," she turned and pad away. Callashine blinked in confusion before getting up to follow. "I don't want to."

"That's okay, that's okay. But hey, Sealshadow?" He bounded up to her side, and she glanced over to look just below his line of sight. "Don't tell anyone about my secret, okay?" The dark spotted tabby nodded, and the pair climbed across the rock path lined with oat grass back to the burrowed camp entrance.

vii

[image]

Sealshadow lay near the nursery, Kangaroostep laying across from her. The pretty, russet queen's three kits were play fighting with Callashine, and the two she-cats watched the play from the side. It had been two full days since Callashine had told Sealshadow his secret. Clouded sunlight poured in from the cave's entrance and out from the cracks of the covered up exit, and a wind softly whispered through the cavern. Kangaroostep licked her paw, drawing it across her ear as she thoughtfully watched her kits tumble with the newest warrior.

"I never thought I would be where I am. I was so grateful when BluffClan let me stay when I was merely a loner. You were *so* kind to me back then, Sealshadow. I remember one time the fresh kill pile was empty and you went out and caught a piper just for me! I wasn't sure what was happening when you left after I mentioned how hungry I was, but then you came back a while later with the little thing. I think that's when I knew I wanted to become a warrior of BluffClan. And it wasn't long after that Vinesplash and I had these three crazies," she motioned to her kits as they pulled at Callashine's fur.

"I should bring you and the kits something to eat!" The warrior stood, and Kangaroostep purred at the suddenness of the declaration and swished her tail.

"You're far too kind."

Sealshadow trot over to the freshkill pile, excitement warming her fur. *I like helping my clanmates. Kangaroostep still appreciates how I helped a long time ago!* Her tail swished back and forth happily as she looked over the selection for the day. Her eyes lit up as they fell on a fish in the pile of mostly birds. *I like bass a lot!* Her stomach growled. *I haven't had my meal yet today... but I think the kits should*

get to try bass.

She scooped up the large fish and made her way back to the reddish brown queen. As soon as the kits saw the meal, they leaped off of where they had Callashine pinned and raced over.

"I like fish!" Avocetkit announced. The reddish and brown mottled ticked tabby was the only she-kit in the litter, and definitely the loudest.

"Me too, fish is my favorite," Sealshadow swished her tail happily.

"I've never had this one though...," Ternkit whined. He sat down next to his mother, turning his nose up. "I don't like it."

"You've never tried it," she chastised, but he gave an indignant sniff. "Say thank you to Sealshadow, you three."

"Thank you!" Curlewkit, the last of the three, cheerfully waved his tail with a warm purr. He gave his sister a swat, snapping her out of her longing stare at the finned creature.

"Mm, thanks!" Avocetkit practically howled her appreciation for the whole camp to hear. Callashine padded over, slumping down nest to the kits. Ternkit muttered a thanks under his breath, and his mother narrowed her eyes and pulled him away for a stern chat. The two siblings left let out little giggles before diving into the meal. Sealshadow dipped her head and pad away with a purr, happy to have helped the small family. The dappled warrior made her way to the palm branches in the shadows that had become her spot, when she noticed a slinking figure in the darkness. She crept forward curiously, but relaxed as a familiar one-eyed figure could be made out. It was Shark, the cat that Callashine traveled with.

"Hey, dog-breath." The stocky silver she-cat greeted casually.

"That's not very nice...," Sealshadow meowed softly.

"I'm taking off. I'm not sticking around here anymore. I stayed long enough for Callashine's to become a warrior and all but I need to go," the one-eyed loner shook her head as she spoke. She paused, a curiosity touching her blue gaze. "Did he tell you anything about his

past?"

"He said... he said he was a loner but left home because everyone disliked him." Shark scoffed at this.

"Calla has always attracted cats to him, and he's always *craved* for cats to be attracted to him. He loves attention," they both cast a look back to where the white tom basked in compliments from Kangaroostep's kits. "He didn't leave on his own accord. He was chased out. He's not who you think he is," she stretched low to the ground so that her long, pale belly fur touched the palms that cushioned the area.

"Why are you... telling me this?" Sealshadow flicked her tail back and forth.

"You're the only cat he wants to share a genuine relationship with. I've known him for several moons. Usually when he makes bonds, it's all on the surface for him. Whether it's for his advantage or whatever. With you... he truly wants the connection. He doesn't just want to swim at the coast, he wants to dive underwater and touch the sand and find shells. I don't know why, and I don't really care why. I just... I don't want him to hurt you or this clan like he hurt his group he grew up in." Sealshadow tipped her head to the side. Shark swished her tail to brush it off. "I want the best for him. But, I also think this Clan doesn't deserve to be toyed with by him. You were all very kind to take us in," she dipped her head. "I'll be going now." The bulky light gray tabby made her way out, sneaking past the warriors to avoid goodbyes. Sealshadow watched her disappear and sat down in her spot to watch her clanmates.

Callashine couldn't be bad like how she said. He's kind. He has my back, no matter what. He wants to help this clan. She felt a burning of watching eyes, and briefly caught the glance of Crabberry. The prophecy. The one who walks in darkness will destroy the light.... *I will destroy the light.*

What if... the light... is Callashine?

//
an

every time I read Avocetkit I thought it said Avocadokit

I meant to post this on Friday but I got distracted oops sorry.

edit: added a photo of Shark.

viii

[image]

Camp was mostly quiet, a serene breeze whispering through the cove. Many warriors were gathered around sharing tongues. Callashine animatedly recalled a time he survived a two-leg attack, while Sealshadow sat to the side with Piperwhisker grooming his pelt the color of sun-warmed sand. The undersized BluffClan deputy had been debating with himself on whether or not he should ask Stonestar for an apprentice.

"I've never had one, so it would be good experience. ...But, I don't want to seem needy or anything by asking Stonestar for an apprentice...," the golden-brown tabby sighed, looking to Sealshadow for advice.

"The elders told me once that in the old Clans, deputies had to have trained an apprentice to be a deputy," she offered, her eyes tracing Piperwhisker's white paws. He softened, purring.

"Maybe I should just ask him them." They were quiet for a moment, Sealshadow's tail flicking back and forth as she usually did. Piperwhisker's gaze had risen to rest on Callashine in the distance. "Does Callashine seem... off at all? To you?" Sealshadow shook her head.

"No, he's good." Piperwhisker nodded.

"Okay. I just... I get worried about you, y'know? I just think about what happened when we were apprentices in the ocean... I don't want you to get hurt." She let her gaze rise to meet his for a heartbeat before turning away. *The ocean... the blood....* She could remember it. The memories crashed down on her like the salty

waves did from that night. Cats were yelling at the shore, trying to call her back.

"Sealpaw! Sealpaw, come back! He's already gone, it already got him!" She couldn't stop though. *Kelppaw could still be out here. He could still--.* Another wave washed over her, pulling her under the water. She choked for air, but only bubbles streamed out and disappeared into the depths. Instead of air, she received a mouthful of shocking salt water just covering the irony taste of blood present. She fought to the surface, her head breaking through the choppy waters. She coughed violently, water spitting out of her mouth. She couldn't find him anywhere. *It got him. The... barracuda. It got him. He's gone. I can't even find his body... just blood.* Another wave tumbled down, though instead of pulling her deep under, it gave her a hearty push back toward shore. She felt jaws on her scruff, and in the half-light of the moon's rays, she made out the determined look of Piperpaw.

The ocean back then... it had been the time where they had all shown their true colors. Piperpaw, the tiny tom who seemed incapable, fought the current to retrieve her. Dolphinpaw and Raypaw who had dared Kelppaw to go out had been too scared to leave shore.

Sealshadow stood up, looking out of camp's entrance. Sunlight poured in, stronger than before. *It's sunhigh! It's time for me*

"I won't get hurt. It's sunhigh, I hunt at sunhigh," she meowed simply. The deputy looked up at her with a soft look and nodded.

"Good hunting, Sealshadow. Oh! It's supposed to rain later, I can feel it," he noted, and she dipped her head with thanks before setting out.

The warrior made her way up the slope out of the camp's narrow entrance, padding out into the loose, sandy terrain. The air was humid and an uncomfortable heat had settled in the air. *I should hunt quickly so I don't have to be in this heat too long. I want to go back to camp where it's nice and cool....* The clouds were thickly rolling across the horizon, separating where the bright blue sky met the deep hues of the ocean. The water were choppier than usual, so she decided against trying to hunt for anything in the waters. She pad

along the bluffs around the ocean's shore, her eyes falling on the tall beachgrass that marked a possible hunting spot. She cracked open her jaws slightly checked the air, and the scent of sandpiper filled her mouth. She dropped down to the ground, but flicked her ears back as she heard the the shuffling of paws racing through the sand.

"Sealshadow!" Her name rang out, and she sighed as she saw the small pale brown and white bird take off from the grasses.

"You made the sandpiper fly away," she meowed flatly as Callashine trotted up. His blue eyes were bright with happiness, and a small smile touched his face.

"I'm sorry, I'll make it up. I just have a request for you!" He purred brightly. She stood up straight and tipped her head to the side curiously. "I want to meet with you tonight at The Cliffs! I have something important to ask you...!" She felt a purr in her throat and dipped her head.

"Okay." He jumped into the air happily, and she took a step back so she didn't get sprayed with sand as he landed.

"I can't wait. Here, I'll do your hunting for you to make up for what I did," she tipped her head to the side and he nodded. "Really, I will. Go on." He purred, and she nodded, turning around with her tail high with happiness. *Callashine has something he wants to tell me* and *he's doing my hunting in this heat?* Her fur warmed, and not from the harsh sunlight. *The whole prophecy thing really is a lie. There's no way Callashine could be some evil cat-- he's only been good to me this whole time. He's done nothing but be kind to the Clan. He plays with the kits, and is friends with everyone. Dolphincloud doesn't mess with me anymore because of him, too.*

The sleek warrior hastily retreated from the heat of the day, the sand warm on her pawpaws. *I didn't hunt today, so I still need to do something for the Clan....* Her eyes caught the snowy white pelt of Cloudpaw as she disappeared into the elder's den. *I can help with the apprentices' chores in the elders den!* She started down the slope toward the elder's den built near the great, big, mostly blockaded, emergency exit. The den was built of mud, palm branches, and drift

wood slanted against the cavern's walls. The sound of the ocean's lulling waves could clearly be made out from the elder's den, and was one of Sealshadow's favorite parts of being in the den. She had always loved listening to elder's stories with the sloshing of water falling over itself in the background.

The den was dim, but after a moment she could easily make out the three elders resting in their nests along with Cloudpaw working away with the familiar sharp scent of sand sedge. The snowy she-cat was carefully working at the ginger tabby Sumacleap's nest, lining the palm and feather nest with a layer of sand sedge on the bottom to protect the nest from sand fleas.

"Nina, look! It's Sealshadow!" Sumacleap purred, his eyes closing as he purred. Cloudpaw turned with a grin.

"Sealshadow, coming to give me a paw...?" she meowed hopefully. The spotted she-cat nodded.

"You Sealshadow, you're too good to us older cats," Nina purred roughly with a gravely voice. Her ruffled black pelt was lined with scars, and an ear was completely shredded in half.

"Well, Callashine did my hunting for me so I wanted to help somewhere else," she meowed simply, picking up a few strands of sedge from Cloudpaw's pile, and started on Nina's nest.

"Oh! Sealshadow's here!" Otterblossom picked up her head from where she lay. The elderly tortoiseshell had been losing her once-sharp senses when Sealshadow was still a kit. However, her clouded hazel eyes were still soft and bright with kindness as they slowly focused on Sealshadow's form.

"Yes, I already said that!" Sumacleap flicked his tail with a gruff smile. "Say, that Callashine is a fine young cat! He's visited us once or twice."

"That's once or twice more than my own son has visited. Vinesplash hasn't come around in *moons!*" Otterblossom lamented.

"Callashine did your hunting for you? That's lucky...! He does like

you a lot, though!" Cloudpaw purred, her tail swishing back and forth as she weaved the sedge messily. Sealshadow thoughtfully tucked in the long, dark grass through Nina's bed as the dark elder licked a paw slowly.

"He wants to talk to me tonight, he told me to come to the Cliffs and meet him." Cloud jumped up, her fur fluffing up with excitement.

"Sealshadow, he's probably going to ask you to be his mate!"

"...Mate?"

"Yeah! Kangaroostep told me if two cats really like each other, they can ask each other to become mates! Mates have to be good to each other though; if they're mean to you or if they do bad things, then they aren't a good mate," she meowed the second part with a serious look in her eye, as if repeating Kangaroostep's exact words and intonation. Otterblossom's eyes shone as she nodded in agreement.

"Callashine is going to ask you an important question, huh?" Sealshadow jumped as Albatrossleaf pad in. The medicine cat set down a leaf holding a chewed up poultice. Sealshadow paused, unsure.

"I don't... know. Cloudpaw thinks so," her tail swished back and forth, and she began kneading the ground with her paws.

"Don't worry, it'll be okay," The soft-furred white and gray she-cat ducked her head. "You just have to tell him how you feel; if you don't want to then tell him that. If you don't feel comfortable, you can come back to the medicine den and I'll help you." Sealshadow hummed softly and nodded. "Here, Sumacleap, I have something to soothe those sand flea bites...," Sealshadow stood up, backing away from Nina's nest. *Too noisy. Too noisy. Too much... stuff happening, I have to leave.*

"I... have to go." She meowed suddenly, turning and leaving the den. She made her way over to her shadowed spot, circling before sitting down. It had gotten to noisy and simply... too much.

Sealshadow closed her eyes, breathing slowly in and out. After a few moments, she blinked open her eyes. Callashine was making his way down the slope into camp with a sandpiper in his jaws. He dropped the prey at the pile, and waved his tail to call over someone he had made eye contact with. She blinked as Piperwhisker made his way from outside the warriors den, and the pair shared a few words before the smaller tom dipped his head, and they left camp. She tipped her head to the side with interest. *Callashine must have a lot on his mind to have a private conversation with Piperwhisker and with me in one day.* She turned to her fur and drew her tongue over her paw to clean herself. She felt her ears warm, and her stomach turned with nervous happiness. *What if Cloudpaw is right? What if Callashine like likes me?*

+ + +

Crimson light bled across the horizon, blooming into the darkening hues of the oncoming night sky. Dark clouds blotted out much of the sky, giving a sickly darkness to the warm air. Sealshadow made her way up the of slope out of camp, which had settled down for the most part. Apprentices and kits with their mother's had already gone off to their nests, while a few warriors were still sharing tongues in the darkness of oncoming night. The dark spotted tabby crossed the bluff overlooking the beach. Waves tossed and turned violently, spilling over onto each other with a violent force. She padded along, carefully avoiding brush and vines that stuck out and fighting the urge to stop as she heard the chirp of a cricket deep in the oat grass. The cliffs were just ahead of her. It was a spot where the land grew tall before sharply falling to the rocky shores.

Sealshadow tread up the grassy slope, her heart fluttering in her chest as she saw the white tom at the top of the cliffside, overlooking the stormy ocean crashing below.

"...Callashine...?" her voice was just loud enough to be heard over the waves.

"Sealshadow...!" he mowed with a purr, though he had his back to her still. Something was.. off. She continued up the hillside.

"What did you want to tell me?" she meowed bluntly, but

excitement buzzed in her chest.

"You're just in time." The wind shifted, and started to pick up. A sick scent washed over her, turning her stomach. *That's the smell... of blood.* She crested over the top of the cliffside, and her eyes fell to where the cliffside gently sloped before cutting down sharply. A a lump of fur was sprawled on the ground, blood soaking the familiar golden brown tabby pelt. "I told you I want to bring a new life into this Clan. This is me, ending an era. I wanted you to be here for it." Her eyes tore away from the lump of fur up to Callashine. She realized what was off about Callashine: crimson red stained his muzzle and paws, and a few cuts marred his pristine coat.

"What... did you do to him...?" she whispered. "P-Piperwhisker?"

"Help me finish off the the old BluffClan. We'll rebuild it in a way that I envision it, a way that respects every member and every aspect of life. Starting with Piperwhisker."

//

an

I had everything up until this last divider done for the last month but I wanted to have this cliffhanger and I JUST got around to writing it thanks to corona break. Expect the next chapter soon, although Animal Crossing is coming out tomorrow sooooo.....

ix

[image]

Sealshadow's mind desperately grasped for a paw hold in the situation, and she stepped toward the tabby deputy laying limp. "Piperwhisker is bleeding, we have to help him...!" She meowed, voice full of distress. Callashine cut her off though, the red staining his muzzle standing out sharply against his white coat. The dark clouds holding the humid tension in the air seemed to grow thicker.

"No, Sealshadow. I'm changing this Clan, and Piperwhisker is the only cat standing between me and Stonestar." She took a step back, her eyes full of desperation and confusion. He exhaled, and pressed on. "We'll raise BluffClan from the ashes, it'll be stronger than it is now. It'll be a Clan that is willing to do what it takes... for community and unity," he stepped aside and tipped his head toward Piperwhisker. "*I'm* doing what it takes to achieve that goal. I want you to stand with me. I want you to be by my side...," he ducked his head low. "Help me." He made his way to the deputy, grabbing his scruff and started to pull him toward the edge of the cliff. The small deputy let out a small whine of pain, and attempted to squirm away but couldn't muster the strength. *No. Not again. I can't let my friends die again...!*

"Stop!" She lunged forward, grabbing the thick fur just behind his front leg. He yipped in pain and let go of Piperwhisker's scruff. The snowy tom twisted in her grasp, and shoved her away. There was just a moment of eye contact. Just a moment of confused blue eyes meeting determined, hurt sea-green ones. He looked away. It was only for a heartbeat before he looked back, and pushed forward.

"Stop being a fool, Sealshadow. I'll give you everything. You won't have to work anymore, you can do whatever you'd like. You'll be loved by everyone. I'll make them love you... I'll make them see that bright and beautiful cat that *I* see. You'll be happy."

She shook her head, her face falling to look to her paws.

"No...," she whispered quietly. Then, louder, she repeated herself. "No. I won't be happy, because my Clanmates won't be happy." She could see it already: Crabberry and Albatrossleaf with darkened faces and Cloudpaw without any of the light she once had. Kangaroostep wouldn't be happily watching her kits play games anymore, and everything would be dark and tense and full of pain. "You'd be ruling a Clan of misery. I don't want that!" He grit his teeth, his face twisted with pain. The wind began to pick up, battering at their pelts.

He let out a yowl and lunged at her. She moved to get out of the way, but his claws managed to catch her shoulder. He dug in, bringing her in close as he slammed her to the earth. He raised his claws to strike again, and she tore herself free from his grasp with a '*tch'* of pain. The dark tabby rolled back to her paws, and in the same movement jumped and grabbed his shoulder with her jaws. Callashine let out a growl of pain and shook her free, but not before receiving a claw swipe to the cheek. They went on for a moment before breaking apart.

Sealshadow breathed in a shaky breath. Dull dusk light cascaded across the sandy cliffside, and night winds battered at her bloodied and clawed up pelt. Everything was aching. Her paws, her muscles, her mind, her heart. She grit her teeth, shutting her eyes tight and forcing back a sob.

"You said you would be there for me, Sealshadow..!" Callashine cried. The battle-torn she-cat gazed up with blue-green eyes, though the edges of her vision were starting to blur. His once pristine coat was now matted with blood and mottled with dirt.

"I know... I know, and I'm sorry. I'm so sorry...." She averted her gaze the second she saw it: the heartbreak and pain in his eyes.

"How could you do this? To me? To us? To *everyone*?! Please, just come back to me!" He yelled over the wind, his eyes closing as he yowled. Sealshadow gasped for air; she hadn't realized she had been holding her breath. Rain began to prickle at her pelt, and she hung her head, and her voice was barely audible over the wind.

"I should be asking you the same thing." He looked away, and the gales seemed to die down right as he spoke, so that his quiet words could be heard.

"Why can't anything ever work out for me...? Why can't things ever go *my way,* where I end up on top? I try, and I go the distance, but it never means *anything!* I *always* end up losing. In the gang, I fought and *killed* and it didn't mean *anything!* I was cast out because I was too much of a dreamer."

"Your dreams involve killing to get what you want. It's wrong." Sealshadow flicked her tail back and forth. Her paws kneaded at the ground, and she shook her head. *I need to leave. I need to leave....* Her eyes went to Piperwhisker laying limp and she kneaded her paws again. *I can't leave him. I can't leave Piperwhisker, but I need to go back to Albatrossleaf. She'll help me.* Callashine spit angrily at her remark. A blast of wind and heavy rain buffeted at her as she tuned everything out.

"Fine...! You don't want me, that's fine! But I won't stop fighting for what I dream of!" He snapped, and unsheathed his claws. She looked up to see him jumping at her, teeth bared, but couldn't do anything to defend herself. His teeth dug into the back of her neck, just above the scruff, and his claws into her shoulder blade. His weigh pushed her down to the ground, and the urge to flee hit her harder than before. She twisted in his grasp, but stopped herself from rolling as she realized they were too close to the cliffside. She desperately brought down a paw on his temple, stunning him long enough to escape his grasp. She launched to her paws, but he bit down on her hind paw. She yipped in pain and kicked her other leg out at him. The warrior only heard the clatter of pebbles falling down the cliff, rain wash at the earth, and his quiet, innocent gasp of fear. Sealshadow swung her head back just as he tumbled backward. Her eyes grew wide. *No-- Callashine!*

She didn't even think. She was there. Her teeth dug into his scruff, and claws into the slowly soaking earth. Her muscled screamed as she held the tom above the crashing sea foam below. He looked up at her, and she wasn't met with the power-hungry, bitter face from before. Rather, she saw the same, starry-eyed and idealistic friend. His pelt heavied as the storm drenched it.

"You really did always have my back. I think... I messed up." He eyes, the color of the high, bright blue skies he shot for, rose up to meet her gaze, and then he squirmed, swinging his claws up at her. The claws connected and his grasp on him loosened, and the heavy tom fell from her grasp. She could only watch as he fell, hitting the cliffside along the way, and disappeared into the hungry ocean. Her gaze desperately searched for the bob of his head, but all signs were swallowed up by the frothy waves. She took a few steps back, feeling lightheaded. *This can't be real. This can't...* She made her way to Piperwhisker, but felt her paws falter, and watched the world swirl as she collapsed to the ground.

X

[image]

For a second, she wasn't sure what was real. Was that a dream? Or is this a dream? Sealshadow blinked open her eyes, bleary light meeting her at first before slowly adjusting to be clear. Early morning sunlight streamed in through the camp's entrance and between the brush piled up in front of the exit. She was in the medicine den; she recognized the mud and branch walls.

"Sealshadow?" She blinked and turned.

Piperwhisker! He's... all hurt... The golden and white deputy lay, cobwebs and poultices swaddling his frame, making him look even smaller than usual. *So it wasn't a dream.*

"You saved me," he whispered. His eyes were weary, barely awake. "I feel bad. I'm your deputy and friend, *I* should've protected *you*." He smiled weakly. "Thank you."

"Alright, alright, 'nough talking from you!" Crabberry pad in, a bundle of cobwebs in his mouth. "And you!" he turned to Sealshadow. The ragged, old, red tom gave a grin. "I knew you could do it, prophecy cat! Dark one who walks in the shadows! You've destroyed the light, and saved the Clan!" He swished his tail happily, seemingly proud that he had correctly interpreted the prophecy after seasons of doubt.

"Destroyed..." her eyes wondered up to the top of the cave, "Callashine...? Where is he?" Another form entered the cave,

Sealshadow didn't bother to look as she recognized the soft, sweet scent of Albatrossleaf.

"When you didn't come back last night I got worried and went to look for you. I found you and Piperwhisker, but... no Callashine. A patrol went looking for him, but the only sign is high blood down the cliff-face." The gray patched she-cat sat down. Sealshadow looked up at her softly rounded ear-tips.

"He was my friend."

"He was our enemy." Crabberry stayed bluntly. "I'll tell the whole Clan that you saved them, that you were prophecized seasons and seasons ago!" The silvery-muzzled tom purées, excitement in his dull yellow eyes.

"No, no, no!" She backed up, her tail tucking and paws kneading at the ground. Albatrossleaf ducked her head.

"It's okay, Sealshadow..!" Piperwhisper piped up, picking his head up. He winced in pain at the sudden movement. "He won't say a word about the prophecy, I'll make sure of it." Crabberry gaped.

"But— everyone's called me crazy for it! I'm not!" The medicine cat growled.

"You're crazy to put her in the spotlight like that." Albatrossleaf muttered.

"Cats won't like her for her, they'll like her for a prophecy," the deputy murmured, and set his head back down.

"Sealshadow, what do you want, then? Do you want your clanmates to like you? Do you want them to praise you? What do you want?"

Quiet settled in, the dark spotted tabby kneading her paws and swishing her tail back and forth. *Callashine promised me he'd make everyone like me... but I think I'd rather just... stick to the shadows. If my clanmates don't like me... then they're missing out.*

"I want to hunt at sun high, and then eat my meal right after. I want to take care of Company, and take walks on the beach. ...I don't

want things to change. I only want them to change if... if my clanmates have changed and they really want me."

"Fine," Crabberry sighed. "Fine. We won't say anything about it." He flicked his tail and turned. "I'm going to speak with Stonestar and let her know." Albatrossleaf gave a soft smile.

"You know... I think you made the right choice for yourself. I think that's worth everyone's respect." Her soft green eyes closed as she purred, and Sealshadow looked away. Piperwhisker was half-awake, but when he looked up at her, his golden eyes gleamed with pride. He eyes fluttered to a close, and he settled into a soft sleep.

"I should get going. I need to check on Kangaroostep's kits; Avocetkit has a cold and she's scared it's kittencough." She laughed and head into the partially walled off medicine storage before heading out with a bundle of white-petaled flowers and mass of green stems and leaves connected to them.

Sealshadow watched her pad away, and set her head back down. She couldn't help it as her mind wondered back to the familiar blue-eyed white tom. She could remember him passionately talking by the seaside, and defending her in front of her clanmates. He helped hunt with her. He faced off the crab. *Callashine... I'm so sorry*. She felt her heart ache in a way it had never ached, and she grit her teeth with an unknown pain. *He's really gone. Callashine is gone, and he's not coming back. It hurts so much... I really really liked him, but he hurt Piperwhisker and was going to hurt more.* She set her head down in her paws. *I wish I could go back. Maybe I could've saved him....*

+ + +

Soft waved washed up, the foam licking at Sealshadow's paws. She softly opened her eyes at the sound of her name being called.

"Sealshadow, it's time to head back to camp! Let's get something to eat." She turned to see Piperwhisker standing on top of the rocky outcrop lining the beach, the avocet they had both taken down at his paws. His long, thick fur was now broken up in a few spots where scars marred his pelt, but they had healed fine over the past few moons.

"Coming...!" She purred, taking one last glimpse of the lazy clouds creeping across the azure sky. She could remember sitting and watching those same clouds with Callashine just a season ago, but as she made her way to the golden patched deputy, she pushed the memory away.

"It's beautiful out today," he remarked as she bunched her muscles and leaped to the top of the rocks. She nodded in response.

"I saw some turtle eggs in the brush over there!" She remarked with a smile. "I hope a crab won't find them...," she sat down and Piperwhisker gave a small purr.

"We'll have to come back and check on them, then," he picked up the long, peach necked water bird.

"But if there's a crab coming after them, we can't fight a crab!" She gaped, looking over to the shorter tom. He gave her a side-eye and a smile.

"I'd scare that crab all the way back to its nest; it's wish it never left it's hole." She nodded in understanding.

"You *are* the deputy; you're super strong even though you're small!" He visibly shrunk at the backhanded compliment. "I mean, your mind is strong! It makes up for your size." He purred at this.

"You're pretty strong, too. I bet if we worked together, we could take on a crab." Her face lit up at this.

"Really?!" Piperwhisker nodded as they came up to the camp's entrance.

"Mmhmm! Here, why don't you carry in the avocet? You're the one who sniffed it out!" She shrugged and grabbed the bird from him, though found it difficult to squeeze into the hole with the massive wader.

"Wow, Sealshadow, did you catch that?!" She made her way into camp, and was met by three bouncing apprentices. Kangaroostep's three kits had grown and been apprenticed, Ternpaw dancing around her paws as she made her way down.

"Well--er, Piperwhisker and I both did...,"

"That's huge! You know, I'm named after avocets!" Avocetpaw meowed proudly, pushing her brother aside.

"Did you finish cleaning the elder's den?" Piperwhisker looked down on Avocetpaw, and she laughed sheepishly.

"I mean, we started, and then we went to get more feathers, and then Ternpaw said he wanted to show off a cool move he learned from his mentor--" The deputy gave one look to his apprentice, and she ducked and darted away to return to her chore. Her siblings followed suit, tails tucked. His eyes gleamed with a joyful happiness, even with his apprentice's failure.

"You like having an apprentice?" Sealshadow set the great bird down on the pile. Her eyes went to a bass sitting on the top, and her mouth watered at the opportunity to have fish that day.

The golden and white tom nodded, eyes closed with happiness.

"Yeah, it's a lot of work, especially with what's happening with Stonestar...," he looked up to the leader's den, where Albatrossleaf was disappearing into with a bundle of herbs. "It may have been best to wait until after she got better to get an apprentice, but I'd rather not miss this opportunity...!" They made their way to just in front of the emergency exit, their new spot to relax.

Sealshadow glanced over to the dark, secluded area that she once had found solace, where the discarded palm branches had grown stale and dead. That spot was from a time of solitude. She smiled as she settled in a patch of sunlight, setting the thick bass down in between the two. However, before they could dive into their meal, Piperwhisker's name was called. They both looked up to the leader's den, where Albatrossleaf had a worried face. The deputy grimaced and stood.

"I have to go... Save me a bite?" He gave a side-smile, looking to the spotted tabby for a ray of light in his stressful job. She nodded quickly.

"Of course." He made his way up the winding path to the constructed den on a ledge, and she turned back to the meal before her.

She took a bite of the bass, her mind flashing to the time she had given a bass to Kangaroostep's kits with Callashine. The white tom smiled in her memory. He was always smiling in her memories. Even in the end... he was smiling. She sighed, and bit into her meal. He was smiling... but she knew what had lay under the smile. A vision of light, a vision of pain. She choked down the bite, and sunk into another bite of fish. A vision that had to be stopped. *I did the right thing... I did the right thing....*

But I wonder if I'll ever get over it? I wonder if I'll ever see myself as someone who did the right thing.

Sealshadow blinked slowly, looking up to where the sun poured into camp, so bright that only the white light blinded her for a heartbeat.

I wonder if... I'll ever get his face out of my head.

end

end

author's note

Wow. So... that's *The Stars Lied*. I hope you enjoyed it, I know it was a little bittersweet. Sometimes the ones we love turn out to be not who we thought they were, and sometimes we're the ones left feeling guilty about protecting ourselves (or in Sealshadow's case, protecting others as well). Actually don't know if that's a universal experience, but I know I've experienced it. It's something that haunts me, and I hope I was able to illustrate it.

I may post a character aesthetics chapter for this fic, mostly because I want to make an aesthetic for Callashine bc I found a really cool quote for him lol

Thank you so much for reading, I really do hope you enjoyed it.

Next, I'm going to try and finish Waterfall before I move onto another work, because I have a whole fic planned called *The Weight of Living* that I may or may not write.

Other Works by Me (maybe check out if you want?)

Spark // warrior cats fanfic, completed. 31 chapters.

Crows // warrior cats fanfic, completed. 16 chapters.

Waterfall // warrior cats fanfic, wip. 21 chapters (out of 25).

Dictator // warrior cats crowd-source fanfic, wip. technically 9 chapters, 63 parts.

Fight or Flight // warrior cats, sequel to Spark. eternal wip. 12 chapters.